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Dean Logan's Blog

Student Initiatives, Near and Far

Posted by David Logan on 05/25/2011 at 04:22 PM

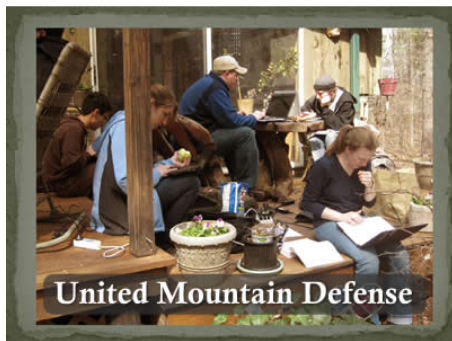
We are very proud of the commitment of RWU Law Students to improving the world. I want to highlight just three of the examples, which had our students not only volunteering in RI and nearby Southeastern Massachusetts, but also in Maryland and Alabama.

Perhaps the most far-reaching example is our Alternative Spring Break Program. Evolved from the response of law students to the post-Katrina tragedy in the Gulf, the ASP program is now nation-wide and, as the title suggests, has law students devoting their spring breaks to public service rather than leisure. Our students, working with our terrific Director of Public Service/Community Partnerships Liz Tobin Tyler, tackled 5 remarkably different programs.

Here is Liz's summary:

Alternative Spring Break 2011

Alternative Spring Break (ASB) is a project of the Association for Public Interest Law and is completely student driven and organized. This year, student leaders Lynn Laweryson, Amy Goins and Jaime Rogers developed five week-long law-related public service projects during spring break. Rather than relaxing during spring break this year, 46 students participated in public service projects at organizations in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maryland and Alabama. The projects were diverse and the students received rave reviews from the supervising attorneys with whom they worked. The students also described how meaningful the work was to their development as lawyers serving underrepresented clients and communities.



United Mountain Defense, Alabama

Six students travelled to Alabama to work with United Mountain Defense. Students reviewed documents requested under the Freedom of Information Act by Defenders of Wildlife that will be used by UMD for litigation. Alumna Dawn Euer (a former ASB organizer) provided a training for the students on environmental law issues prior to the trip. The students bunked in a house on the premises and ate meals with the staff there.

[Click here for a photo collection from the Alabama project.](#)



Maryland Public Defender, Baltimore, MD

Twenty-three students travelled to Baltimore to work in several different units in the Maryland Public Defender's Office. Their work ranged from working on murder trials to advising clients about traffic laws at a driving record clinic.

2L David Ellison describes his experience:

"For me personally, it was great to talk to clients first hand. It was also a moving experience to be in the Northwest Baltimore area and see the neighborhood first-hand. There are a lot of foreclosures and not many businesses. You could see how hard it would be to grow up there and even more difficult if you were a convicted felon trying to get a job. It was nice to see an office that was able to give their clients more than legal services. It was also great to see they were doing expungements. What stood out to me the most was that it was hard for prosecutors to win jury trials because the jury in Baltimore is more likely to believe the defendant than the police officer, which I take as more of a social problem than a legal problem."

Know Your Rights Get a Court Interpreter

TELEPHONE: (401) 222-8710	COURT INTERPRETERS OFFICE	FREE INTERPRETATION
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The Rhode Island courts provide free interpretation for court proceedings as required by Federal law. To request an interpreter contact the Court Interpreters office once you know your court date.

RI ACLU, Providence, RI

Six students worked with RI ACLU and the U.S. Department of Justice to document court access to interpreters. They spent time observing in courts all over Rhode Island and conducted interviews to assess how effectively interpretation services are administered in RI courts. They also created "know your rights" materials about the right to interpretation services that are being distributed to community-based organizations in the state.

South Coastal Counties Legal Assistance, Fall River, MA

Six students worked with South Coastal Counties Legal Services (SCCLS). SCCLS represents former tenants of the now-vacant Watuppa Heights public housing complex in Fall River, which is slated for demolition and redevelopment. Pursuant to an agreement that SCCLS helped to

negotiate, the Fall River Housing Authority was to provide all tenants assistance with finding new housing and obtaining the relocation benefits to which they were entitled. The students attempted to find current contact information for all former Watuppa tenants and interviewed many of them to see whether they had received counseling and benefits. Their work revealed that some of these clients, particularly those who aren't fluent in English, had not received their relocation.

Immigration Law, Education and Advocacy Project, Fall River, MA

Five students worked at the Immigration Law, Education and Advocacy Project (ILEAP) in Fall River, Massachusetts. The students conducted research of asylum country conditions, helped with client intake at the organization's office in Hyannis, Massachusetts, and worked with ILEAP's Immigration Domestic Violence Project, interviewing clients in the Fall River office and drafting client declarations and memorandums.

Another major initiative was home-grown: a group of progressive students not only formed a chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, but also in their first year of existence organized and hosted a regional conference. Here are some words from one of the student organizers, followed by a picture from the conference:

“The RWU Law student chapter of the National Lawyers Guild started off strong during the 2011 spring semester hosting a number of events, including the NLG 2011 Northeast Regional Conference because of the emergent energy and activism of the RWU-NLG chapter. The theme for the conference was deconstructing misconceptions surrounding the concept of activist lawyering; thus, the conference was aptly titled, “Ready, Represent, Radicalize! Demystifying the Dominant Ideology for Activists.” Approximately 50 people attended the conference, including students from RWU, Western New England Law, Vermont Law, and Harvard Law. Also in attendance were attorneys and practitioners from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York, and Connecticut.”

“Consistent with the theme of deconstructing misconceptions surrounding activist lawyers, topics for the conference included: juvenile immigration, workers’ compensation and immigration, drug prohibition, revolutions in the Middle East, domestic terrorism, land reform in Venezuela, labor unions and workers’ rights, and the anti-war movement in Rhode Island. The weekend culminated with a keynote address from Lizzy Ratner and Philip Weiss, who are co-editors of The Goldstone Report: The Legacy of the Landmark Investigation of the Gaza Conflict. This presentation concerning recent revolutions in the Middle East and their impact on Palestine engaged the audience and stimulated further discussions about international law, political will, and social justice.”

“The conference concluded with a brunch on Sunday morning where conference attendees convened to reflect on their experience over the weekend. The general sentiment about the conference was positive, and many attendees commented that they gained a deeper understanding of social justice issues and that they left feeling intellectually stimulated. Despite having little time to plan the conference and being a new student organization on campus, the RWU chapter pulled off an immense achievement and underscored RWU Law’s commitment to social justice.”



Lipou Laliemthavisay ('13) with keynote speaker Phillip Weiss

Finally, a group of students, led by Student Bar Association President J. P. Pruett, developed a program in which RWU law students provide informal legal counseling for RWU undergrads. Here are some thoughts from J.P.:



I am pleased to announce that the pilot panel for the Legal Education Project went on without any major glitches this evening at the Global Heritage Building.

“We had about 10 undergraduates (we were competing with the steak and lobster dinner) and a few law students. Everyone that attended seemed interested and engaged in the panel and we received several compliments on the panel itself, the presentations, and the general idea behind the panel. ”

“The three topics that were presented were:”

- Landlord Tenant Act of RI
- General things to look for in a lease
- Student rights when living in University Housing

“We had a wide variety of questions particularly on sub-letting, security deposits, and the rights of students in university housing.

Overall it went very well and we had a lot of requests for more panels next year on this topic and on other topics that are relevant to students. We hope to expand this program to include several more topics that concern many college (and law) students and have several panels throughout the year.”